"LIGHT IN DARKNESS"—A TRAGEDY OF AN ARTIST'S LIFE.

By Henri Sienkiewicz,

THE AUTHOR OF "QUO VADIS."

"He opened wide his eyes and gazed intently; it was a Sister of Mercy. Sitting there motionless, her face turned slightly toward the window, her head bent, her hands were folded in her lap and she seemed to pray. The patient could not see her face, but instead he saw clearly her white hood and the dark outline of the delicate arms."

THERE come sometimes in the Autumn, especially in November, days so wet, cold and overcast that life even to the robust is dreary. Since Kamionka fell ill and had stopped working on his statue of "Mercy," the bad weather annoyed him more than his illness. Every morning, dragging himself from his bed, he rubbed off the moisture on his studio window and looked up, hoping to see even a small bit of blue sky, but every morning he was disappointed.

Heavy, leaden mist hung over the earth; there was no rain, yet even the cobblestones looked like wet sponges. Everything was damp and clammy, soaked through with moisture, and the water slowly dripping from the eaves sounded with a monotony of despair, as if measuring the weary, slowly dragging hours of gloom. * * *

On such days the studio became as dismal as a sepulchre. Marble and plaster require bright weather, but in this leaden light they appeared sombre; images of dark terra cotta, having lost distinctness of outline, seem to change into grewsome and hideous shapes.

Dust and disorder added to the general melancholy; the floor was covered with a thick layer of dirt, caused by the mixture of crushed terra cotta with mud from the streets. The walls were dark, ornamented here and there with plaster models of hands and feet. Not far from the window hung a mirror, and over it was the skeleton head of a horse and a bunch of makart everlasting flowers, totally blackened by dust.

In a corner stood a bed with an old cover, and by its side a bureau with an iron candlestick on it. For the sake of economy Kamionka slept in his studio; generally the bed was concealed by screens, but now they were removed to allow the sick man to look out of the window.

Still good weather did not come. After several days of gloom the clouds lowered and a heavy, dark mist settled over the land. Kamionka, who was lying on his bed with his clothes on, feeling worse, got up and removed his clothes and went to bed. Properly speaking, he was not suffering so much from any particular disease as he was depressed, discouraged, exhausted and desponding. He had no desire to die, yet he felt he had hardly strength enough to live.

The long hours of the murky day seemed still longer because he was alone. His wife had died twenty years ago; his relatives dwelt in other parts of the country, and he kept aloof from his colleagues; his acquaintances gradually ceased all intercourse with him on account of his ever-increasing irritability of temper. In the beginning his disposition amused people, but later he became more and more morose, so that even the slightest pleasantry provoked lasting umbrage, and his nearest friends were compelled to break all relations with him.

About this time he became devout in his religious observances, but his intimates questioned his sincerity, and evil-disposed persons said that he spent his time in churches so as to influence the priests to give him orders for sculpturing. That was not true. It may have been that his devotion did not arise from a deep and settled conviction, but it was not self-seeking.

If there was any ground for these suspicions against him, it was strengthened by the fact that Kamionka became a miser. For the sake of economy, he lived for several years in his studio, denying himself proper nourishment. His face became transparent and yellow, as if made of wax; he concealed himself from others, so that he might not be called upon to perform any small service.

About a year after the death of his wife he once saw in the shop of an antiquarian an old engraving representing Armida, and in the face of Armida he traced a likeness to that of his wife. He bought the engraving, and afterward he became an enthusiastic collector of engravings representing not only Armida, but other subjects also.

Those who have lost their dear ones must interest themselves in something, otherwise they could not exist. Concerning Kamionka, no one could guess that this strange, selfish man had loved his wife more than his own life; perhaps if she had not died, the current of his life would have flowed peacefully, broadly, and humanely; as it was, this love survived his happier days, his youth and even his art.

Had he not been an artist he could not have survived his loss so long, but his calling served him in this wise, that after her death he began to sculpture figures for her monument. It is useless to tell the living that the dead care little where they die. Kamionka desired that the last resting place of his Sophia should be very beautiful, and his work on her monument was a labor of love. This was the reason that he did not become insane in the first six months of his deep anguish, and he gradually learned to live with his despair. The man's life was warped and unhappy, but the art served the artist. From that time on, Kamionka existed only for his art.

When Kamionka became sick, no one called upon him except his servant, who came to make tea for him. At every call she entreated him to get a doctor, but he, fearing the expense, refused to do so.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon it was so dark that Kamionka was compelled to light a candle, which he did with great difficulty, owing to his weakness. As he reached for the matches he observed the emaciated condition of his arms, and their appearance wounded his artistic sense.

The flickering of the candlelight filled his studio with weird shapes and shadows. The light of the candle fell directly on Kamionka's forehead, from which it was reflected as if from a polished yellow surface. The rest of the room was in a dark shadow, which every moment deepened. When it became totally dark outside, the statuary in the studio assumed an animation of outline, as if standing out in relief from the blackness, and in the rising and falling beams of the candle, the statues seemed to be rising on tiptoe, as if to peer in the emaciated face of the sculptor to find out if their creator were yet alive. Indeed, his face bore the fixedness of death, though occasionally the thin blue lips of the sick man moved slightly as if praying, or perhaps cursing his loneliness, and the exasperating regularity of the dripping eaves, which seemed to slowly measure off the dreary hours of his illness.

That evening his servant appeared slightly tipsy, which made her more loquacious than usual. She said to him: "I have so much work to do that I can only come twice a day to attend you, had you not better call in a good Sister of Mercy? It will cost you nothing, and she will nurse you better than I can."

Although Kamionka was inwardly pleased with this suggestion, so contradictory was his disposition that he rejected it.

After the departure of the servants he began to think of it. "Sister of Mercy. Ay! she does not cost anything, and, besides, what a help and comfort!" Like all sick people, Kamionka conjured up a multitude of imaginary ills, and combated a thousand of petty miseries, all of which added to his annoyance and impatience. For hours he would lie with his head in a most uncomfortable position before he would make any attempt to change his pillow. Often when he was cold at night he longed for a cup of tea, but if it was difficult for him to light a candle, how much more so would it be for him to boil water. A Sister of Mercy would do all this for him with her usual kind thoughtfulness; such help would rob his sickness of half its terrors; he at last arrived at the conclusion that illness under such conditions would be desirable and fortunate, and he wondered in his heart if this poor happiness were accessible to him.

It seemed to him that if a good Sister would only bring to his studio her peaceful serenity and quiet cheer, then, perhaps, the weather might clear up and the eternal drip-dripping of the eaves would cease to persecute him. He regretted at last that he had not accepted the advice of the servant. The long and dreary night was approaching. She would not appear until the following morning. He felt that this night would be worse than others.

Then he thought what a great sufferer he was, and compared his present with the happy years of long ago, which stood out vividly in his mind. As previously he had connected the good Sister in his weakened mind with fair, bright weather, the memory of those bygone, happy days conjured up scenes of sunshine, light and joy.

He began to meditate upon his dead wife, and talked to her as if she were present, as he always used to do when he felt badly. In the end he got tired, felt weaker, and dosed off.

The candle standing on the bureau burned low in the socket, its flame became blue, then flickered strongly, and at last went out. The studio was filled with darkness.

Meanwhile the eaves kept dripping; drop by drop the water fell with dismal regularity as if distilling all the sin, sorrow and sadness that pervades nature.

Kamionka had a long and refreshing sleep; he awoke suddenly with a feeling that something extraordinary had happened in the studio. The morning had dawned brightly. The marble and plaster looked white. The wide Venetian window opposite his bed transmitted the glorious light.

Bathed in this brightness Kamionka saw a figure sitting by his bedside.

He opened wide his eyes and gazed intently; it was a Sister of Mercy. Sitting there motionless, her face turned slightly toward the window, her head bent, her hands were folded in her lap and she seemed to pray. The patient could not discern her face, but instead he saw clearly her white hood and the dark outline of the delicate arms.

His heart commenced to beat quickly and rapidly, as through his brain ran these questions:

"When did the servant bring this Sister, and how did she enter?"

Again he thought that it was an optical illusion, owing to his weakness, and he shut his eyes.

A moment later he opened them again.

A Sister was sitting in the same place, motionless as before, as if absorbed in prayer.

A strange feeling, composed of fear and great joy, arose in him. Some unknown force attracted his gaze to this figure. It seemed to him as if he had seen it somewhere before, but where and when he could not recall. Then arose in him an irresistible desire to behold the face, but the white hood concealed it. Kamionka, without knowing why, did not dare to speak, to move, or breathe. The feeling of fear and joy grew stronger in him, and he mentally queried, "What is it?"

Meanwhile the dawn had merged into a radiant morning. How beautiful all nature must look outside! Suddenly the studio was filled with a glorious supernatural light. The waves of golden brightness as of some mighty tide inundated the room so powerfully that the marble statuary was drowned and melted in its glow, and the walls receded and disappeared, and Kamionka found himself in a luminous, limitless space.

Then he saw the white hood of the nun lose its shape, vibrate on its edges, fade and float away as a bright mist submerged with sunlight.

The Sister slowly turned her face toward him, and suddenly this lonely, despairing sufferer saw in a brilliant aureole the well-known and beloved face of his wife.

He sprang from his bed, and a cry escaped him in which were embodied all those years of sorrow, suffering and despair.

"Sophia! Sophia!" He pressed her closely to his breast and she put her arms around his neck.

The light became more glorious still.

"You have not forgotten me," she said at last. "Having gained by my prayers an easy death for you, I have come."

Kamionka held her tightly in his embrace, as if fearing this blessed vision, together with this wondrous light, would escape him.

"I am ready to die," he answers, "if you will remain with me."

She smiled with an angelic smile; removing one hand from his neck and pointing downward, she said:

"You have died already; look yonder!"

Kamionka followed the direction of her finger. There, under his feet, through the window in the roof, he saw the inside of his gloomy, lonesome studio, and on his bed lay his own body, with mouth wide open and staring eyes.

He looked on this emaciated body as something foreign to him, and shortly all this receded from his view. The brightness surrounding them, as if impelled by a wind from an unseen world, lifted them together into infinitude.

"PRACTICAL POLITICS AS I HAVE FOUND THEM."

Experiences of Two Representatives of New York's Wealthiest and Most Fashionable Families in the Recent Campaign.

WILLIAM ASTOR CHANLER

BY WM. ASTOR CHANLER,
Assemblyman-Elect.

PRACTICAL politics is the scale in which political theory is weighed, and, when not found wanting, made applicable to existing conditions of life and government.

The very word "practical" covers the whole ground and presents the idea plainly to the mind. It means serviceable, useful, profitable and successful—all in one. The words "practical politics" convey to calm-minded and sensible men an idea which enables them to go about their business in peace—sure that practical common sense work is going on, done by plain but skilful and experienced hands. The only good government is the practical one, though this fact is almost hidden here at the present day by the mass of fanciful nonsense forced upon us by people who have the public ear more than the public confidence. I have no comments to make on the campaign just past. It speaks for itself and explains and illumines the words "practical politics." Three weeks ago theory was rampant. Men's minds were filled with vain imaginings and doubt, and distrust filled every heart. As the days passed, however, and the needs and necessities of every-day life exerted their influence on the minds of this work-a-day million or so in Greater New York, theory was unconsciously and gradually put aside, and when the day for voting came the voters calmly said, "We are too busy now for theory; give us practice." No city in the world could give such a picture of practical and efficient common sense as was exhibited by the proletariat of New York. For in no other city of its size has every man the chance to influence government by his voice, secretly and thoughtfully, and unhindered in any way.

The only method by which the will of the people can be made effective is by means of a machine or organization which devotes its entire attention to the carrying out of this wish as expressed at the polls. Without organization nothing can be achieved, and no political organization can exist for a moment unless it is founded on and governed by practical principles. The only people who can find a place in such a machine are those who are in close and real touch with the living issues of the day, and who by their knowledge and experience can assist the citizen to give expression, and effective expression, to his ideas on those issues. Even a church has need of a vestry, which is its machine for carrying out the wishes of its congregation. If a church has need of a machine, how much more do the people need an efficient organization to help them to give expression to their wishes? For three years theory has had its way, and the result has been so unsatisfactory that the people have laid it away, I think, for good. This city has been governed by amateurs long enough; by people who no doubt meant well, and certainly did well for themselves; but who had no knowledge of the people's wish, or, if they had that knowledge, did not show it. Unless a man has been through a campaign, and has stood in the cold night air on a truck and talked to the common people, the workers, the business men, who, for the sake of hearing their own wishes put into verbal form, also brave the same discomforts; unless a man has watched the faces of the people as they silently pass judgment on what he is saying, he can have but little idea of their wants. More than that, one must have the people's confidence before he can know their wishes and really understand how earnestly and deeply they feel that the man for whom they will vote must be one who feels with and for them. The practical man, the sympathetic man—one with both a head and a heart—is the only one whom they will trust.

They may, in moments of enthusiasm, be led away by soft words and a pleasant smile, but one lesson of that sort is enough for them. What impressed me most was the consciousness that the people showed of their inability to individually achieve what they wanted, and how they looked for and expected some one to carry out their wishes for them. No one man, nor no small body of men can do that. Each block of houses in this great city conceals some idea which wants to find expression and which must find it. During the experience of the past three weeks I saw many men who if they had the opportunity would be as fitted and more so than I to represent the district in which I live; men equally earnest, men who had not only their own interest at heart, but desired to help their fellow man. People in the humblest walks of life showed as much intelligence and took as much interest in their own welfare and the welfare of the city in which they live as those who are more commonly supposed to do so. How are these people to give expression to their intelligent wishes unless there are others who can give the time and take the trouble to do it for them? They know this, and so they delegate their authority to that organization which can do it the most efficiently. And that organization is Tammany Hall. Tammany Hall represents the people, and exists only because it does so, and does so in a practical and efficient manner. It has no room for idle dreamers, and therefore those who spend their time in dreaming dreams do not like it. But the practical and busy inhabitant of this great city does like it, and the last election, if it has done nothing else, has proven that they not only like it, but trust it. Tammany Hall and what it means will be in existence when we are mid away in our graves and our children are grown gray, and the reason is this, that it is founded on the people, exists for their interests and carries out their expressed will in a thorough and practical manner, without regard to mere theory, no matter how attractive that theory may be. It represents, in other words, practical politics.

WM. ASTOR CHANLER.

BY STEWART BRICE,
Councilman-Elect.

THAT which impressed me most in the campaign just ended was the amount of respect shown and the close attention given at all of the political meetings. It was an assurance of the deep interest taken by the people in the selection of their public servants, as well as a manifestation of their prime characteristic, the love of fair play.

I found the people strongly aroused on the questions of home rule and personal liberty. In the new charter we have been given a moiety of home rule by its Republican framers, but we must keep up the fight until we secure it in its entirety. Nothing short of the absolute privilege of making their own local laws and regulations will ever satisfy the people of this community.

In the three weeks preceding the election I made upward of seventy-five speeches and visited every section of my district, which, in territory and population, is the largest in the city. I found the people wide awake, well informed and intensely in earnest. The result of the election is convincing proof that they know what they want and understand the means through which it can be secured. I cannot but recall with some satisfaction that the rank and file of the voters, whose interests were identical with mine, came to me long before the election, or as soon, rather, as I had declared my intention of entering the race, and discussed the important issues uppermost in their minds with me personally. They seemed to be thoroughly familiar with those important questions that every voter in Greater New York appears to have familiarized himself with in this campaign.

There is some satisfaction in being taken into the confidence of the men whose honest vote is the power to elect. And when a citizen, either of high or low origin, came to me for expressions of sentiment, opinion or political belief, I entered at once into his frame of mind, and we talked thoroughly above board. Perhaps one older in politics would have been more guarded than I in many matters involving personal belief, but when a voter with the same individual voting power as myself comes to me as a man, talks to me as a man, he deserves to be treated as one.

The candidate and the voter should go hand in hand through a campaign, as I found in this last fight. The political precepts that are traditionally witheld by some of the political parties from the voting element are never too old, nor should they be too obscure, to be put logically and clearly before them, for their suppression always has a tendency to inspire doubt, which is the forerunner to civil war in organizations. I discerned the presence of an intense anxiety to know just exactly what Tammany Hall and its nominees intended to do for the people, and I therefore carried my platform on my breast, so to speak, talked to the issue, invited inquiry and conducted my campaign in the open.

Throughout the entire campaign, and it was necessarily a vigorous one, I noticed the magnificent earnestness of the men who clustered at our meetings, and who mentally digested the expressions they had heard from the platform. After adjournments I always found little knots of men assembled in the neighborhood turning over in their minds the things that had been dealt out to them by practical political speakers, reducing every utterance to its prime value, its effect upon their welfare, their rights, their freedom of thought and action, and its value to the community. I can never dissociate myself from the ever present fact that those men will hold me personally responsible for my acts, that they will look to me for tangible evidence of my sincerity and honest intentions.

Tammany Hall, through the fidelity of those same men, has got control of the government of this municipality, and will revive its failing, tottering energies to the end that all men coming under the jurisdiction of its policy will profit.

Already, and the echoes of the election have not yet passed beyond hearing, those same men, who cast their ballots for me are beginning to look forward with confidence to the dawn of a new political era, and they are sharing their hopes with me. Even the commonest working man, clad in his overalls and striding to work with his lunch bucket on his arm, is figuring on the direct advantage to this community of the re-establishment of Tammany Hall in the chair of government.

He is not deceived into the belief that with the fall of so-called reform the city and its future is destined to decay, for he knows that what posperity and progress that has been the lot of New York came to it through the policy and under the direction of Tammany Hall. Greater New York will never again be the scene of political experiments, at the cost of the taxpayers, and to the detriment of its upbuilding, which begins anew with the advent of the incoming administration and its principles of progress.

I firmly believe in party organization. Responsible government can only be had through it. There would be no necessity for so-called "reform movements" if those estimable citizens who discover every decade or so that they are the only ones who can give us responsible government would devote themselves and their influence to the benefit of their party organization.

The wisdom of the people's selection on Tuesday last will, I am satisfied, be thoroughly justified, and I think we can all look forward, in common citizenship, to a period of good government under Democratic administration which will confound our friends, the enemy, and insure to all our people the full and free enjoyment of personal liberty.

STEWART M. BRICE.